

# DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH 2025

**Councillors Present:** Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Heather Codling, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines (Vice-Chairman), Stuart Gourley, Justin Pemberton and Vicky Poole

**Also Present:** Councillors Ross Mackinnon, Dominic Boeck, Howard Woollaston and Tony Vickers

**Officers Present:** Melanie Booth (Group Executive), Sarah Clarke (Interim Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director – Finance, Property & Procurement), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director – Children and Family Services), Joseph Holmes (Interim Chief Executive), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), April Peberdy (Service Director – Community Services), and Thomas Radbourne (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Patrick Clark and Councillor Iain Cottingham

### 1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

### 2. Replacement Finance System Direct Award (EX4664)

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 3), which requested approval for a direct award to Unit4 for the supply of a finance system (ERP 7, known locally as Agresso) via Software as a Service (SaaS).

Shannon Coleman-Slaughter, the s151 Finance Officer, reported that the Council had been served notice on its existing contract, which was due to terminate on 31 March, and following investigation of a variety of options it had been decided to approve a direct award to Unit4. It had been determined that it would provide more value for money than a tender exercise or implementing a new finance system.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented that he appreciated the urgency of the decision, but expressed confusion that the proposal would provide better value for money than having undertaken a full tender exercise. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter commented that several factors had been taken into consideration, including local government reorganisation and the cost of implementing a new system, and it was felt that in the longer term the proposal included within the report would provide better value for money.

Councillor Denise Gaines seconded the recommendation within the report.

**Recommendation:** (Vote to be taken in Part II)

- Executive approves a direct award to Unit4 for the supply of Agresso via Software as a Service (SaaS) following the publication of a Voluntary Ex Ante Transparency Notice (VEAT) in accordance with Public Contract Regulations 2015 (PCR2015).
- That Executive approves the award of a four year contract to align with the renewal point of the Council's HR / Payroll system to facilitate consideration of an ERP solution.

## EXECUTIVE - 19 MARCH 2025 - MINUTES

### 3. Ridgeway Council

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 4), which detailed the development of an Interim Plan for local government reorganisation in response to the government's invitation, that would see the option for the creation of a new unitary council covering the existing districts of West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, and the Vale of White Horse, referred to in the Appendix as 'Ridgeway Council'.

Councillor Brooks thanked those members who had participated in the Devolution Advisory Group.

Councillor Brooks noted that there may be a further two submissions by Oxfordshire; one by the county as a single unitary; and another bid by Oxford City along with some proposed boundary changes.

It was explained that if approved, the bid would be submitted to Government by 21 March which would be followed by a public engagement exercise and then a more substantive bid in November.

Councillor Stuart Gourley felt that the proposal was positive and noted the many synergies between the districts including the A34 and M4 corridor, strategic transport networks and rural nature.

Councillor Heather Codling echoed Councillor Gourley's comments and suggested that it was good to be pro-active and submit an early bid.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commented that he was broadly in favour of the proposal, however queried whether it was the best available proposal for children and young people.

Councillor Brooks noted the similarity in culture, area, and geography which seemed to be a better fit than other options.

Councillor Heather Codling commented that West Berkshire understood rural schools and the issues involved with rural education.

Councillor Boeck commented that the authority would be three times its current size and requested assurance that outcomes for children would not be reduced in the transition.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon expressed support for the recommendation and welcomed his group's inclusion on the Devolution Advisory Group.

Councillor Tony Vickers, as North Wessex Downs Partnership representative requested assurance that the group would be involved in future negotiations. April Peberdy, Service Director – Community Services, confirmed that officers would be speaking to all relevant groups.

Councillor Howard Woollaston expressed support for the proposal but noted few cost savings. Councillor Woollaston expressed concern with increased responsibility for a much larger electorate and consequently the potential growth in caseload.

Councillor Denise Gaines seconded the recommendation within the report, noting the similarities between the districts, and rural element. Councillor Gaines emphasised that it was an interim report and that there would be far greater detail in November if the bid was supported by Government. In relation to a potential democratic deficit, Councillor Gaines suggested that parish and town councils would become far more involved and important as a conduit between the unitary authority and residents.

**RESOLVED that:** Executive approve the submission of an Interim Plan by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils, indicating an intention to develop proposals for the creation of a new unitary council in the terms outlined in Appendix A.

## EXECUTIVE - 19 MARCH 2025 - MINUTES

### 4. Exclusion of Press and Public

**RESOLVED that** members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information)(Variation) Order 2006. Rule 8.10.4 of the Constitution also refers.

### 5. Replacement Finance System Direct Award Appendix

*(Paragraph 3 – information relating to financial/business affairs of particular person)*

*(Paragraph 5 – information relating to legal privilege)*

The Executive considered an exempt Appendix (Agenda Item 6), which requested approval for a direct award to Unit4 for the supply of a finance system (ERP 7, known locally as Agresso) via Software as a Service (SaaS).

**RESOLVED that:** the recommendations in the main report (Agenda Item 3) be agreed.

*(The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm and closed at 5.10 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....